DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 960 PS 021 489

AUTHOR Kwartler, Trish Johnson
TITLE Providing Field Experiences for Early Childhood Preservice Teachers with Homeless Children and/or Mothers in an Urban Setting.
PUB DATE 10 Apr 93
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Association for Childhood Education International Study Conference (Phoenix, AZ, April 10, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; Early Childhood Education; Educational Needs; Elementary School Teachers; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Homeless People; Preschool Teachers; Program Descriptions; Program Development; Student Attitudes; *Student Teachers; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Education Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

Based on the conviction that interaction with homeless people can erode negative stereotypes and be a contributing part of a teacher education curriculum, students enrolled in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) course at Kent State University were allowed to substitute an observation of children at a homeless shelter for other course requirements. The purposes of the observation were developed through a brainstorming activity with an ECE class, while choices for activities were established in conjunction with homeless shelter staff. Students were asked to form committees or partnerships, call the shelter and plan an activity, and discuss plans with their instructor if desired. Students completed their observations in pairs and reported back to the class. An analysis of these reports indicates that students shared five broad areas of concern: (1) students' expectations about the shelter residents, environment, and staff were generally negative, with no student expressing confidence; (2) students described their field experiences in terms of significant communication events, parent and student roles, and their critique of the encounter; (3) students examined their own values and beliefs with respect to poverty, class, social services, family, and gender; (4) students' pedagogical concerns included accepting educational responsibility for homeless children and the controversy of including this group in formal curricula; and (5) many students mentioned follow-up activities, such as continued availability of the practicum in the curriculum, placements, and employment. Additional courses have added the option to their syllabi, and to date 120 students have participated. Appendixes include a list of practicum purposes and choices, a 10-question survey of participant attitudes, and a list of areas of concern from student reports. (AC)

ED358960

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Providing Field Experiences for Early Childhood Preservice Teachers with Homeless Children and/or Mothers in an Urban Setting

Presentation at the

Association for Childhood Education International

Study Conference, Phoenix, Arizona

April 10, 1993

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Trish Johnson-Kwartler
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Trish Johnson Kwartler
Kent State University
Department of Teacher Development and Curriculum Studies
Early Childhood Education
(216) 672-2477

PS 021489

Basic necessities for normal growth in childhood include the obvious: nutrition, protection from illness and abuse appropriate stimulation, close attachment, gradual challenges commensurate with growing skills and safe and challenging schooling. **(Konner, 1991)** These are requirements for normal, not ideal, child development; all too often one or two requirements are lacking for the American child. The picture is even more bleak for the homeless or transient child, one that we as teachers may not be able to "see" as they attend our classroom. The caring person dreads the stranger, for she/he cannot easily reject the claim the stranger has on her. "She would prefer that the stray cat not appear at the backdoor - or the stray teenager at the front. But if either presents himself, he must be received not by formula but as an individual." **(N. Noddings, 1984)**

How often are some of these necessities for growth lacking in the lives of transient "stray" children? How can teachers develop attitudes and practices to "see" and contribute to the betterment of conditions for children?

According to the National Association of State Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, the annual estimates of the number of homeless children in America range from 300,000 to 2 million; 317,197 school age children experienced homelessness in 1991. The *Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act for Education of Homeless Children and Youth* defines the term "homeless" as an individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence and who has a primary nighttime residence that is a shelter, institution or place that is not ordinarily intended as a sleeping accommodation. The homeless do not readily identify themselves if receiving

school services; the parents fear being considered incompetent and the children attempt to avoid mistreatment in school. The street homeless and those living with friends and relatives account for only 418 of the identified 15,549 Ohio homeless school aged children. **(State Plan for the Education of Ohio's Homeless Children and Youth, 1990)** In Ohio teachers and administrators report high turnovers in enrollments without knowing that the children are homeless. The shelter and district numbers do not match. **(J. Villa, 1993)**

"No children are well served by a pedagogy for the poor. What happens *inside* schools matters and what happens *inside* classrooms matters- early tracking, sorting and classifying, scapegoating, marginalization ..." **(Polakow, 1993)** Most preservice teachers have not had a meaningful interaction with a homeless person (that they are aware of). We see "them" in the streets and in the media. They are in our classrooms. I propose that interacting with the homeless can begin to erode the negative stereotypes and be a contributing part of a teacher education curriculum grounded in reflective inquiry. We can challenge the structure of schools that produce winners and losers, judged against a preconceived standard. The climate in our classrooms can be *humane and socially responsive*.

We need practice interacting with those at the margins; we are "at risk", the children are "at promise" **(Swadener, 1990)**. Our risk stems from the privilege of our sheltered lives. As teachers we often deliver practice with the goal of intellectual conformity, characterized by an inability to communicate, plan and evaluate with respect for the realities of the child's experiences and strengths.

The creation of family centered attitudes and school structures depends

in large part on the development of new programs of teacher education, to prepare new educators capable of implementing reform. The human diversity and social policy courses and other innovations are producing more sophisticated persons who are able to help guide students in a way that helps the children and families reach their goals. As a small part of that movement, I have implemented a model for a practicum/ field experience involving homeless children and mothers and college students. As a teacher educator, I am experimenting with course requirements, reconsidering what is considered essential knowledge for teaching. Knowledge about the nature of children and society can be taught meaningfully when not isolated from complex problems. Studying and practicing ways that education can improve the human condition should occur simultaneously, the practicum is a beginning.

PILOT STUDY: PRACTICUM WITH HOMELESS PERSONS

In Fall, 1991 I met a program director of an urban homeless shelter for single women or women with children that serves as a temporary residence and social service agency. I was teaching a course that required observations of language development and skills. I wondered if the students would value interacting with children in an alternative early childhood setting, a homeless shelter. Obviously, sitting with a clipboard and doing a direct observation would be intrusive. I wondered, perhaps interacting would be more enlightening? I discussed possibilities of this practicum to substitute one of their observations of language learners with my students; they were curious, responsive and shared potential ideas. The following semester, one of the observations could be voluntarily substituted for a "Parent Involvement

Activity". **(Appendix 1)** The purposes were brainstormed with the class and choices for activities were developed in collaboration with the shelter staff. A small and vocal group wanted to volunteer for the practicum, but had strong reservations about the purposes, they could have selected another option. However, they were satisfied when I distributed a sheet, "Why are we planning an activity which primarily involves parents from a low socio-economic level?" **(Appendix 2)** These ideas had been generated in class, but the written sheet satisfied them about *my* expectations.

The four basic activity configurations were: **committee** (party/picnic), **parent project** (with child care), **toddler and preschool activity with parent,** and **school age with parent or staff.** The students were asked to form committees or partnerships, call the shelter and plan an activity and discuss plans with me if desired. With each semester I added and deleted procedures. Communication with the child advocate was invaluable; her flexibility in planning around student schedules and the shelter staff's support made all my encounters productive and pleasant. It was helpful to have all my students sign up individually for a 15 minute time slot during my office hours or at their convenience to discuss the course in general and assignments in particular. The students journaled with me on a weekly basis; I responded in writing. Both requirements benefitted my practice and helped me negotiate with the shelter to make the placement more appropriate. For example, complex crafts turned into "Story Stretchers" **(Raines & Canady, 1991)** utilizing literature and snacks as a way to bridge the social gaps, interact and have fun.

Initially, my research inquiry was to be a quantitative analysis of

attitudes using pre - post tests that I constructed. **(Appendix 3)** The dependent T test revealed some levels of significance, but the essence of the experience was missing. The project had generated concerns about other areas. Stereotyping and learning differences were not directly or frequently addressed by the students, as I had expected.

Every time a pair or group of students went to the shelter they reported back to the class, casually and briefly. These five minute reports indicated new insights for the students and myself. The students were asked to write a reflection of any length, hand or typewritten, on the experience. The qualitative analysis of reflections, journals, conferences and class discussions indicate five broad areas of concern by the students: **expectations, field experience, values/ beliefs, pedagogy, follow up. (Appendix 4)**

The subcategories of the broad areas are listed below:

1. **EXPECTATIONS**
   - residents
   - shelter environment
   - social service staff
2. **FIELD EXPERIENCES**
   - communication
   - significant events
   - roles of parents or students
   - assessment/critique
3. **VALUES, BELIEFS**
   - concepts of poverty, class, social services, family, gender,

stereotypes

- emotions
- children's or mothers perspectives

4. **PEDAGOGY**
   - acceptance of responsibility
   - controversial nature of perspective
   - learning styles
   - classroom practice
   - school culture
5. **FOLLOW-UP**
   - college curriculum
   - placements
   - employment

The **expectations** ranged from a nightmare about the experience to feelings of discomfort; not one person expressed confidence. The majority of the students mentioned anxieties, "I was somewhat pessimistic about the whole Valentine's Day party", "I felt a little uncomfortable." "I am not sure that I am mentally ready for this experience." "I was afraid they all felt like I thought I was doing them a huge favor and I was better than them." "I must admit I was very nervous before everyone arrived" "The parts of the shelter I did see were extremely clean and *unexpectedly* (author's italics) uncluttered, especially considering the number of people that were living there." "I was even more impressed when --- (staff person) greeted me so warmly at the door."

The **field experience** was often described in detail, particularly by the

students that I did not personally know from the other courses, (ej. words to songs from the Music Methods course). My students kept the details brief and described the experience in terms of significant communication events, student and parent roles and critique of the encounter.

"I personally spent more time with the kids... the mom felt that being verbal was bad." "There wasn't enough supervision for such young children being in the water... I decided I was going to stay in the water. "(picnic at lake); "The only parent-child interaction I came across was women yelling at their children."

Examining values and beliefs about people in poverty and their own emotions was a common theme. Tolerance for ambiguity was mentioned by a few students with experience in the field.

"And to be really honest I did not want to go at all. I kept putting it off. With your suggestion, I decided that it would be most comfortable if I went with you ... I feel kind of silly that I made this trip out to be so bad." "the sing-a-long was probably the neatest part... I saw so much love within all the families, as well as some between families." "It amazed me that someone my age has so many problems .. I felt very lucky to have all I do." "I found this to be a very rewarding learning experience." "I didn't spend any time talking with the parents or older children, mostly because I didn't know how to relate or what to say. I may have been afraid to offend them even subtlety. I wasn't nervous, just blank."

Concepts of pedagogy related primarily to acceptance for the responsibility to work with this population and develop classroom practices. Learning styles were rarely mentioned in connection with language development; that was disappointing. Knowledge that taking on this often controversial perspective (inclusion) outside of the university may be politically challenging in the future, was also infrequently noted.

"I think working with the homeless should become a much more important part of our studies. I think it's reality, and that these are the kids who will be coming in and out of your classroom on a regular basis... It actually gives us an opportunity to use and see the things we learn about."
"I was exhausted! Kids sure have a lot of energy."

Follow up activities were mentioned by many, particularly in the journals and reflection papers. The responses have been encouraging to me; what started as a possible intercultural interaction has become my unexpected area of expertise in the department.

"We need a lot more <u>real</u> experiences like this." "I really enjoyed myself and would like to think the same opportunity would come up again" "I finally realize that life is not that great , but what I saw with those women is that they have someone there to give them a helping hand. Trish, I thought it was a good idea and I hope you keep doing this every semester."

Initially the Early Childhood Education course, Language Development and Skills sections were invited to participate. Additional instructors have added this option to their syllabi: Home School and Community Relations, Educational Foundations, Early Childhood Mathematics and Music Methods in Early Childhood. Some of the students are having their second and third experience at the shelter, making it a field experience instead of a one time practicum. To date over 120 students have participated, including approximately 10 graduate students.

As the principal coordinator/investigator of this project, I have developed a biweekly program of "Family Math" activities on Saturday mornings. I too, need to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes for the undoing of the pedagogy of poverty in spite of my former work in schools and residential centers. Some students prefer to assist me during "Family Math" before planning their own activity. I have conducted an extensive literature search on this topic; the most useful article for practitioners to date is "Homeless Children: A Special Challenge" (McCormick & Holden, 1992). **(Appendix 5)**

This project evolved from a chance meeting to a full collaboration

between urban shelter staff, persons who are homeless, college students and four more university instructors. The shared goal is to provide an opportunity for participants to develop a repertoire of practices and attitudes for facilitating the school experience for homeless children and families. The barriers to attendance are enormous: transportation, school supplies, embarrassment, lack of rest or physical activity, gaps in academic information to name a few. The McKinney Act is providing some of the much needed services, from tutoring to transportation. Once the child is in the classroom the teacher has the opportunity at "life and death" for the child's future. It is essential that we academically challenge the children in our care while respecting families with multiple problems without blame or embarrassment for a pedagogy of empowerment.

REFERENCES

Blue-Swadener, E. (Fall, 1990). Children and families 'At-Risk': Etiology, critique and alternative paradigms, *Educational Foundations*.

Konner, M. (1991). *Childhood.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education.* Berkley: University of California Press.

Polakow, V. (1993). *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Public Law 100-77, (22 July 1987). *Stewart B. Mc. Kinney Homeless Assistace Act of 1987.* Codified at 42 U.S.C. 11301-11472.

Raines S. C. and Canady R. J. (1991). *More story stretchers: More activities to expand children's favorite books.* Mt.Rainier, MD: Gryphon House.

Rodgers, R. F. (1990). Recent theories and research underlying student development. In College Student Development: Theory and Practice for the 1990s (pp. 27-79). Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.

State plan for the education of Ohio's homeless children and youth August 1, 1991-September 30, 1994. (1990). Ohio Department of Education.

Villa, J. (Fall, 1991). *Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act for Children and Youth: School-age children and youth survey.* Ohio Department of Education.

Appendix 1

Language Development and Skills ECED 30123
Parent Involvement Activity

PURPOSES:

1. To develop attitudes and skills which are receptive to parents of low SES status. S
2. Recognition that the majority of parents are instrumental in their child's school success.
3. Begin conceptualizing viable parent involvement on a level that the parents are comfortable with.
4. Responding to "KSU College of Education Mission Priorities"

Working to improve living and learning situations for all segments of society, targeting those placed "at risk" in settings which have not sufficiently promoted the development of human abilities and well- being.

CHOICES: One of the following or a prenegotiated parent activity with an "at risk - at promise" individual or group.

1. Committee preparation of a holiday or special party at the Access shelter, Akron, including games, activities and refreshments. (Fri night or Sat a.m.)

2. Parent Project: Find a partner from our class and select one of the prepared projects (calico picture frames and Polaroid of family) or bring your own project to work with two or more parents. It may be a simple project (stationery) or complex project (ej. Spring basket to give child) , but it must be developmentally appropriate for an adult.

3. Toddler & Preschool with Parent Activity: Prepare a toddler & preschool craft activity and fingerplay. Leave a copy of fingerplay learned for KATS room written on piece of colored paper. 10 a.m. M-F , call for date.

4. School Age with Parent Activity: After dinner special event can be arranged, Liz will return on the evening you choose and bring selected children and parents to the KATS room. Prepare an activity for ages 5-12 and play an "Everybody Wins " game and make a craft with parents and children. 6:30-7:30 p.m., call for date

Activities may not be arranged M, T, Th, Sat 2:30-5:30 p.m.

CHOICES # 1 or # 2 must be prearranged with shelter staff; you will be in livingroom and dining area with participants
CHOICES # 3 or # 4 must be arranged with Liz Findley, KATS Director (special program for activities and parent education); Liz will be with you in KATS room which is located in basement of church across the parking lot. (535-2999) They have paper, glue and markers. Donations of extra supplies welcome; successful ideas are often repeated.

Appendix 2

ECED 30123 - Trish Johnson, instructor

Why are we planning an activity which primarily involves parents from a low socio economic level?
You will be challenged by working with persons currently experiencing dislocation with probable life experiences different from yours.
Barriers to their education are our beliefs:

1. Our tendency to teach them below their capability
   - focusing on deficits "at risk"- vs. " at promise"
   - many do lack school relevant skills but they have others
   - we do not value others social skills, caring, imagination, ability to use analogy, humor, culturally specific behaviors, values, holidays ...
   - poverty may be a dysfunction of the society not the family
   - single parent families are not dysfunctional
   - emphasizing the "basics" through skills based sequentially ordered curricula maximizes teacher control.
2. High rates of mobility of their families
3. Limited English proficiency
4. Low staff morale in some agencies
5. Inadequate resources in society for non mainstream persons

Learning about WHO we are teaching beyond our stereotypes aids in developing a classroom climate that supports learning for all.
The children and parents need to be involved in taking responsibility and being involved in the learning process in school and at home.
Education is not to be out of their control.

We can-
- get some information about the children's out of school life, narrowing even briefly the social distance between the working and middle classes
- give the parent a short time to enjoy a recreational activity, not focusing on her problems- unless she desires to mention them
- model communicative strategies if the children are nearby- ex. heuristic, imaginative, taking their comments seriously
- incorporate life/ cultural skills into our classroom ; provide opportunity to apply skills in curriculum to real-life situations ; reduce redundancy; integrate the curriculum; respect the parents' knowledge of their child and use in developing our own style of teaching and attitudes

We are in the roles of researcher/ observer/ participant simultaneously. We are all learning to transcend conceptions about the poor and their "inadequate" language usage.
Our lifelong development of personal theory of learning will keep us adapting for best practice for the children. To do this we must be culturally congruent in the classroom.
That's why ! Comments ... ?????

Appendix 3

NO NAME BIRTHDAY_____CLASS RANK_____

Policy Poll

Directions : Mark each statement with your belief based on the following scale.

1. strongly disagree 2. disagree 3. agree 4. strongly agree

A. It is reasonable for Mothers receiving welfare to require the practice of birth control.

B. Parents and teachers may be reluctant to cooperate and communicate because of fear or awe of one another.

C. Black students often rely on words that depend upon context for meaning; these words have little meaning in themselves.

D. Black students prefer oral- auditory modalities for learning communication.

E. Black children may learn faster with techniques that incorporate body movement into the learning process.

F. All able bodied persons receiving public assistance should be required to be working or in a job training program.

G. Without a lot of toys parent and child can touch, exchange various forms of communication and learn from one another.

H. Poor children are usually taught below their level of capability due to teacher expectation.

I. To develop a climate for learning the teacher should respect an illiterate parent's knowledge of her/ his child.

J. The poor child's out of school life is often very different from the school culture; the teacher's primary job is to help the child learn the culture of the middle class.

POST

STUDENT CONCERNS and COMMENTS

1. EXPECTATIONS
   - Residents
   - Shelter Environment
   - Social Service Staff

2. FIELD EXPERIENCE
   - Communication
   - Significant Events
   - Roles of Parents or Students
   - Assessment/Critique

3. VALUES, BELIEFS
   - Concepts of Poverty, Class, Social Services, Family, Gender, Stereotype
   - Emotions
   - Children's or Mother Perspective

4. PEDAGOGY
   - Acceptance of Responsibility
   - Classroom Practice
   - Controversial Nature of Perspective
   - Learning Styles
   - School Culture

5. FOLLOW-UP
   - College Curriculum
   - Placement
   - Employment